

Holiday Reduction & Recycling Tips

Maine State Planning Office

Waste Management & Recycling Program



The holiday season, with all of its associated buying, wrapping and celebrating, substantially increases the amount of waste that we generate. There are, however, many opportunities for the consumer to reduce, reuse and recycle the remnants of holiday cheer. Listed below are some tips for reducing your household's waste during the holiday season.

GIVE YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE A SECOND CHANCE

Buy an evergreen - in a pot or with a root-ball wrapped in burlap - to transplant after New Year's. Dig a hole about 2' across by 1.5' deep before the ground freezes and store the soil in garage or basement. To plant, remove from container (with burlap, just loosen ties; burlap will decompose on its own); replace soil so top of roots sits lightly aboveground. After packing dirt around roots, mulch with 3" of hay or other evergreen branches. Check with your local nursery for specific care related to your climate conditions.

RECYCLE CHRISTMAS TREES

Some communities recycle Christmas trees by chipping and mulching them for compost or landscaping materials. Trees must be free of tinsel, decorations, nails, tacks or any other foreign materials. Check with your town office to see if a tree-recycling program exists in your area. Recycle tree trunks for firewood or split for kindling. Use branches as mulch under acid-loving bushes and shrubs, such as rhododendrons or evergreens.

OLD BATTERIES

There are two major types of batteries used in appliances and toys -- single use batteries and rechargeable batteries. The rechargeable batteries typically are nickel-cadmium and should not be discarded into regular household trash when they no longer hold a charge. Many retail and hardware stores such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Radio Shack will accept these used batteries for recovery and recycling. The single use batteries, such as the alkaline ones, no longer contain high amounts of mercury and may be disposed of in household trash when they are exhausted.

DONATE REPLACED ITEMS TO CHARITY

New gifts will often replace appliances and clothes that still have a useful life. Collect these items and donate them to Goodwill, Salvation Army, local churches, daycare centers or charity groups. See if your town has a "bargain barn" or "swap shop."

RECYCLE CARDBOARD BOXES

The holiday season creates a tremendous amount of cardboard waste. Be sure to separate corrugated cardboard, bundle it and take it to your local recycling center. Check first to see if your local area accepts cardboard and how it should be prepared.

REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE GIFT WRAP

- Just add bows to holiday shopping bags or gift boxes instead of wrapping.
- Buy gift-wrap made from recycled paper. Avoid wrapping paper with foil highlights, as it cannot be recycled.
- Only use the amount of wrap that you need. Loop string around gift boxes, then lay it out on paper to determine how much to cut.
- Wrap gifts in brown paper bags or newspaper; use the cartoon section for brighter colors.
- Wrap gifts in festive holiday fabric, dishtowels or bandannas, which can simply be washed and reused.
- Give gifts in baskets, tins, or jars.
- Save bows, ribbons and paper to reuse next year. Shred wrapping paper to use as filler or instead of tissue.

REUSE HOLIDAY DECORATIONS

- Save your holiday decorations for reuse next year.
- Donate decorations to local schools, churches, town offices, or nonprofit organizations.
- Use natural ornaments such as pinecones, shells, dried flowers or berries.

TIPS FOR HOLIDAY SHOPPING

- When shopping, use reusable canvas bags to carry purchases rather than paper bags. Refuse a bag for small purchases. Ask for the box the product came in or get a clothing box for the item instead of collecting both a box and a bag.
- Choose products that are minimally packaged. If a toy has several layers of paper and plastic packaging, choose a similar product that leaves less waste.
- Purchase items made of natural materials like wood rather than plastic. Better yet, choose items made from recycled materials.

TIPS FOR MAIL-ORDER SHOPPING

- Ask mail-order companies who ship your holiday gifts not to use polystyrene packing peanuts, but to use paper instead.
- Save bubble wrap or “peanuts” for reuse.
- Recycle those “peanuts” at businesses like Mail Boxes Etc.
- After you have completed your mail shopping, remove your name from catalogue mailing lists by writing to: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, PO Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735-9008.

TIPS FOR GIVING

Be prudent and practical as well as thoughtful and creative. Purchase gifts that are long-lasting or that can be reused and later recycled. Avoid “gag gifts” - they quickly become trash. Secondhand or antique shops are great places to do holiday shopping. Consider giving gift certificates or tickets for services or special events, rather than purchasing an item that may not be used or needed.

TIPS FOR HOLIDAY PARTIES

- Use cloth napkins, silverware, glass drinking cups and ceramic coffee mugs, and reusable plates rather than disposable plastic dinnerware, cups, and plastic products.
- Rent party furnishings rather than buying things that you will only use once a year.
- Reuse plastic margarine tubs or yogurt containers to store holiday leftovers.

REUSE HOLIDAY CARDS

- Cut the picture side of the card off and reuse it as a card, postcard, or gift tag.
- You can also send the picture side of cards to: St. Judes Ranch for Children, PO Box 985, Boulder City, NV 89005, where the cards are used for fundraising.
- Recycle cards that can't be reused.

For more information, please contact:
State Planning Office
Waste Management and Recycling Program
State House Station 38
Augusta, Maine 04333-0038
(207) 287-8934 or 1-800-662-4545
www.recyclemaine.com